

Rep. Charlie Wilson Co-Sponsors Key Legislation

Washington - Legislation Advances Blue Dog Priorities and Takes Next Steps to restore Fiscal Accountability to Government

The fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition officially unveiled the "Blue Dog Fiscal Accountability Package," three pieces of legislation that would further restore fiscal discipline to the federal government after years of budgetary mismanagement and irresponsible deficit spending.

The legislation builds on the progress already made by the institution of pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) rules in the House of Representatives, a measure the Blue Dog Coalition successfully fought to have included in the first 100 hours of the 110th Congress. Blue Dog leaders touted today's accountability package as an essential tool needed for Congress to further address the nation's long-term fiscal challenges.

"After six years of reckless fiscal practices and irresponsible deficit spending, the Blue Dogs are firmly committed to restoring the fiscal integrity of our nation," said Rep. Mike Ross (D-AR), Blue Dog Co-Chair for Communications. "In order to do that, we must reinstitute statutory pay-as-you-go rules and commit to balancing our budget, just as most American families do. This Blue Dog endorsed legislation is a much needed next step to ensure that the Congress does just that."

"Our national debt has increased \$3 trillion in the past six years. There is no question that the fiscal recklessness and mismanagement of the past six years have jeopardized our country's fiscal situation," said Rep. Dennis Moore (D-KS), Blue Dog Co-Chair for Policy. "My fellow Blue Dogs and I have been successful in our fight for a return to a fiscally responsible budget process, but more progress must be made. That is why we are taking the lead on this important issue by putting forward a package to reinstitute critical budget enforcement tools that were instrumental in restoring fiscal discipline in the 1990s, make the budget process more transparent, and make a balanced budget the annual goal of our government."

The first piece of legislation included in the "Blue Dog Fiscal Accountability Package" is the "Fiscal Honesty and Accountability Act," led by Blue Dog member Rep. Baron Hill (D-IN). This bill strengthens the commitment of the Congress to fiscal responsibility and accountability by reinstituting statutory PAYGO rules and implementing multi-year discretionary spending caps. The bill would also close a loophole in the current law that has been used in recent years to add billions of dollars in routine spending by designating it "emergency" spending.

"Over the past six years Republicans' reckless fiscal practices have led our country to record

deficits and allowed our debt to increase by more than 60 percent," said Rep. Baron Hill (D-IN) "We must act in a decisive manner now to stop such spending habits that will leave our children and grandchildren with insurmountable debt."

The second piece of legislation, led by Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), is the "Balanced Budget Amendment," which would provide for a Constitutional Amendment requiring Congress to balance the federal budget every year. The proposed legislation allows for flexibility during times of war, natural disaster or an economic downturn, by giving Congress the ability to waive the balanced budget requirement with a three-fifths vote in the House and Senate. The bill also prohibits cuts in Social Security benefits from ever being used in order to balance the budget.

"If New York families have to balance their checkbook, so should the federal government," said Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). "The federal government's spending habits are hurting our national security, by requiring us to borrow over 75% of our new debt, from countries such as China and Saudi Arabia. The deficit puts us at immediate risk from global political and economic problems, and I believe our children and grandchildren deserve more leadership and accountability."

In order to provide for a more open and honest government, the third piece of legislation, the Blue Dog "Strengthening the Budget Process Resolution," led by Rep. Heath Shuler (D-NC), Rep. Charlie Melancon (D-LA) and Rep. Charlie Wilson (D-OH), ensures that members of Congress have a sufficient amount of time to properly examine legislation to determine its actual cost implications. In order to further ensure transparency in the process, this resolution also requires that a full Congressional Budget Office (CBO) cost estimate accompany any bill or conference report that comes to the House floor.

"These are the type of common sense rules we need that will help foster a transparent process," said Rep. Charlie Wilson (D-OH)

"For the last six years President Bush and the Republicans in Congress recklessly increased spending, while driving our nation deeper into debt than ever before," said Rep. Heath Shuler (D-NC). "I am committed, along with my Blue Dog colleagues, to restoring fiscal restraint to the federal government."

"Reigning in wasteful government spending is the first step in balancing our nation's budget and slashing the deficit," said Rep. Charlie Melancon (D-LA). "With this legislation, the days of negotiators adding expensive 11th hour sweeteners to bills in order to gain votes will be numbered. And lawmakers will know exactly how much of the taxpayers' money a bill will cost before they have to vote on it. Our government needs to set fiscal priorities based on needs - not wants - and the Blue Dog budget process reform resolution will bring the accountability and transparency necessary to enforce those priorities."

The fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition was formed in 1995 with the goal of representing the center of the House of Representatives and appealing to the mainstream values of the American public. The Blue Dogs are dedicated to a core set of beliefs that

transcend partisan politics, including a deep commitment to the financial stability and national security of the United States. For more information, visit the Blue Dog website at <http://www.house.gov/ross/BlueDogs/>.

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